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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

POLITICAL CONDUCT

OF THE

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS;

INCLUDING

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THEIR HISTORY, FROM
THE TIME OF QUEEN ELIZABETH;

IN FIVE LETTERS TO A FRIEND,

BY THE

REV. DAVID RIVERS,

*Late Preacher to a Congregation of Dissenters
at Highbury.*

There is a stiff-neck'd, harden'd crew,
That give not Cæsar, no nor God, his due;
Reprobate Traitors, Tyrants of their own,
Yet grudge to see their Monarch on his Throne.

NAT. LEE.

LONDON:

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OBSERVATIONS, &c.

LETTER I.

Retrospective View of the History of the Dissenters.

DEAR SIR,

THE very extraordinary political conduct of the Protestant Dissenters, during the whole of the reign of His present Majesty (but more especially *of late years*) ; their avowed attachment to *those Men* whose principles and conduct were openly inimical to Government ; their bold attempts to shake off those restraints which the wisdom of the Legislature had in former times imposed ; and their unnatural coalition with *Catholics*, to answer their own sinister and dangerous designs against the Constitution ; has been a subject of astonishment to some persons : but, as I have frequently observed in conversation with you, it has not in any degree excited my wonder. No, Sir. As a *collective body of men* (for there are some truly loyal and excellent individuals among them) the Protestant Dissenters ever have been aiming, to adopt Dr. Priestley's elegant term, " to undermine and blow up the Constitution." In the series of

Letters I shall have the honour to address to you, I presume I shall be able fully to prove what I have asserted. Having been brought up, educated, and, occasionally, preached among them, I have for a series of years made it a point to study their political character and bias; and have had those opportunities which a stranger could not possibly have had. — Believe me, it is not from any rancour, or in consequence of any incivilities I have received from them as a body, that occasions me to take up my pen; — I am impelled and constrained thus to act, from the existing circumstances of the times, and from a sense of my duty as a loyal subject. I wish none of the privileges which the Dissenters are *justly* permitted to enjoy, for *conscience' sake*, to be retrenched or abridged; they have a right to worship God in that mode they conceive most analogous to Scripture and to reason; but they have no right to *dabble in politics*. They have no right to neglect praying for the King; they have no right to stir up the flames of sedition, and to become the firebrands of the State; — they have no right to propagate French Principles, or to become *United Irishmen*. — Such, however, has been their conduct. But previous to my entering upon a review of their recent behaviour, I shall, agreeably to your request, present you with a short analysis of their History, from the time of their first appearing in this country, under the name of Puritans, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

When

When our venerable Reformers first began that important work of renovating the English Church, and clearing it of the rubbish and superstition of Popery, every step they took was guided by the most profound wisdom and sagacity. Aware of the prejudices of the human mind, of the bias arising from education, and the force of custom, they proceeded gradually in the glorious work of Reformation, and were extremely anxious to preserve every thing of *little importance* in the old religion, while they expunged from their creed every doctrine, and from their formula every ritual, that was opposite or not conformable to the Holy Scriptures. With respect to canonical habits and vestments, and various ceremonies, such as bowing at the name of Jesus, making the sign of the cross in baptism, and the observance of feasts and festivals, they made such retrenchments and alterations only as were essentially necessary. The moderation, the candour, and the wisdom, of those great and illustrious men, cannot sufficiently be admired.

While the Reformers were thus employed in eradicating Popery, the seeds of discontent and of envy began to appear among some of the Reformed; who, as if they wished to strangle the Reformation *in its cradle*, raised objections against the measures that had been pursued; insisted that every fragment, vestige, and rag, of the “Old Whore of Babylon” (as they termed the Church of

Rome) should be cast off, and that the Reformation should be carried much farther than it had been.— In the reign of King Edward VI. a difference had arisen between Dr. Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, and Dr. Ridley, of London, respecting the Episcopalian vestments. Hooper refused to wear them ; and Dr. Ridley, equally sensible of the fallacy of the objections raised against them, would not consecrate Hooper : at length the latter complied, and became an illustrious ornament of the Church, for he died, in the succeeding reign, a martyr in support of the Protestant Religion. But the first seeds of that wretched schism from the English Reformed Church, that has been attended with such evil consequences, were sown at Geneva, by Calvin, among those who fled thither to find an asylum from the bloody persecution raised against the Protestants by Queen Mary. This sour and morose Reformer “ was unquestionably in theory a Republican ; * his ideas were peculiarly narrow and illiberal. He was a rigid enemy to those decent rites and ceremonies which the English Church had retained ; he wished to strip religion of all its trappings, and was an advocate for a *purer* mode of worship. These novel and Utopian ideas were eagerly imbibed by many of the English Exiles ; who, on their arriving in England

* See the masterly observations on the political principles of Calvin, by that eminently learned Prelate Dr. Horsey, Bishop of Rochester, annexed to his eloquent Sermon before the House of Peers, January 30, 1793.

upon the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne, formed themselves into a party, and seceded from the Mother Church. They were styled "Puritans," from their affecting a more *pure* mode of faith than others. "The prudential measures Queen Elizabeth adopted, to recover the reformation of religion (says Bishop Burnet) might have been expected to have *united* the Church; but this, by the passions of some, the interests of others, and the weakness of the greatest part, was denied us." *

During the whole of the reign of this illustrious Princess, the Puritans were obstinately factious, and frequently plotted against the Queen's life. Hacket, Coppenger, and several other of these sectarists were executed for seditious practices. Archbishops Parker and Whitgift were assiduous in stopping the progress of fanaticism; and by the decrees of the star-chamber, many were fined and thrown into prison. Mr. Neale † has much exaggerated their cases, which, if, perhaps, in some instances, too rigorous, were justified by the critical circumstances of the times, and the behaviour of the puritanical party.

What must have been the consequence had they been suffered to carry on their practices, and openly vilify the Queen and hierarchy, may easily be guessed

* Burnet's History of the Reformation, vol. ii. p. 407.

† Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. i.

by their subsequent conduct in a future reign. Their ungenerous endeavours to weaken and distract the government during the Queen's reign, was evidenced by their ready alliance with any disappointed nobleman, who wished to form a faction against the court. Thus, when the proud Earl of Leicester, and the turbulent Earl of Essex, were banished from the court, they found *zealous partisans* among the Puritans, and consequently put themselves at their head.—But, Sir, if you wish for a portrait of a desperate puritanical reformer, contemplate the character, and read the biography of John Knox. He it was, who blew the trumpet of sedition against the unfortunate and beautiful Queen of Scots—who published “The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,”—who, after delivering an exhortation to the Queen, jocosely said, “I made the Hyæna weep.” *

When the son of this unfortunate princess ascended the English throne, the Puritans entertained the highest hopes of favour and patronage; but James had seen too much of fanaticism in Scotland for to encourage its growth in his newly acquired dominions. To give them an opportunity of pleading their own cause, he appointed a conference to be held at Hampton Court, between an equal number of divines of the Establishment and of the Puritans,—the sequel was, as might be expected, a deadly blow to

* See Seward's Anecdotes, vol. i.

the cause of the latter. Archbishop Whitgift had previously echoed to the king, “ no bishop, no king”. James knew the enmity of the Puritans to the Episcopal Bench, and wisely profited by the hint. James ever after discovered his aversion to the Puritans, and to shew his contempt for their pretended sanctity, he ordered the Book of Sports to be read in churches, a measure equally weak as it was totally indefensible.—Encouraged by the mildness and lenity of Archbishop Abbot, they began to become turbulent, when the death of James, and the accession of Charles I. gave another damp to their prospects.—Charles was more disgusted with the Puritans than his father, and the elevation of Laud to the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury, who was their avowed enemy, gave occasion for the exercising some severities which were undoubtedly inconsistent with the true and genuine spirit of the Protestant Religion.

Much provocation was given by the Puritan writers, who, by vulgar invectives and scurrilous libels against the court and the bishops, excited just indignation. William Prynne, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, was convicted of writing one of these libels, and sentenced to pay 5000l. to stand in the pillory, to have his ears cut off, and be banished the country. Dr. Bastwick, a physician, and Mr. Burton, a dissenting teacher, had similar sentences passed upon them. These proceedings alarmed the Puritans, and mul-

multitudes of them sought an asylum in New England, and there founded English colonies.

When the long parliament met, November 3, 1640, the ills of the nation were redressed ; but the Puritans smarting under the lash, exerted their utmost efforts to stir up the people against the court, the bishops, and the king. Their resentment was not allayed by the execution of the Earl of Strafford and Archbishop Laud, their principal adversaries ; but they ceased not caballing until the standard of rebellion was hoisted against their sovereign : and he was deprived both of his crown and his life.

The Dissenters were not so lost to shame as not to be sensible of the everlasting odium with which posterity would hereafter look upon them, as the perpetrators of this black deed. These seceders from the Church had schisms among themselves, and divided into innumerable parties, each of which possessed the most in placable hatred for the other. Anabaptists, Sabbatarians, Millenarians, Fifth Monarchy Men, and many other sects equally heterogeneous and chimerical in their notions, had their rise among the Puritans.

The two principal parties among them were the Presbyterians and the Independants : you recollect the story of Dr. Radcliffe and his man bandying the Hasty-pudding about, and throwing spoonfuls of it

at each other ; such was the conduct of the Puritans, each party was willing to avoid the imputation of cutting the King's head off, and throwing the guilt of it upon the other ; it is of little consequence what denomination of the Puritans occasioned this melancholy event. The fact is certain, that to the Puritans alone, was this tragical event owing. It was their vile fanaticism that inebriated the minds of men, and set them against Episcopacy, caused them to abolish the upper House of Parliament, to behead their Sovereign, and bring in a compleat levelling system ! Was not the Parliament composed of the lowest dregs of the nation, the scum of society,—draymen, butchers, coal-heavers, tinkers, coblers, and tub-preachers, all under the guidance and direction of the ambitious but penetrating Cromwell, who made Puritanism the ladder by which he ascended to the highest summit of dignity ? It matters not what was the *popular denomination* of Dissenters at that time. If it had not been for the Puritans, Charles would never have been beheaded, and *Cromwell* would have remained in the situation he originally was, that of a private gentleman. His usurpation of the reins of Government was entirely owing to the *Puritans* : for, by adroitly adopting their blasphemous cant, he easily acquired that superiority which his singular talents improved to answer his own private ends and sinister designs

But, Sir, let us now take a survey of the behaviour of those men, when armed with power, those meek and pious saints, who were for ever “ seeking the Lord.” And by consulting the annals of that time; you will find nothing but *intolerance* practised by those very men who had so loudly exclaimed against it. Surely that was a time when some of the “ fruits of the gospel” might have been expected to have been evidenced by men who acknowledged no King but *King Jesus*, and who arrogated to themselves the title of chosen of the Lord. Not content with hurling the bishops from their seats of eminence, destroying every vestige of episcopacy, demolishing the first reliques of antiquity, and violating the sacred ashes of the dead, they persecuted the clergy of the establishment with vigour and unparalleled cruelty. The most eminent piety, or the greatest talents, could not screen its possessor, if a minister of the Church of England, from their ruthless barbarity *. The venerable Bishop Hall was not only deprived of all his church preferments, but his library and household goods were seized and put up to sale. Speaking of these villainous transactions, the aged and pious prelate thus expresses himself: “ The sequestrators sent certain men to appraise all the goods that were in my house, which they accordingly executed with all diligent severity, not leaving me so much as a dozen of trenchers, or

* See Walker’s Sufferings of the Clergy.

my child's pictures out of my curious inventory ; yea, they would have appraised our very wearing apparel, had not some of them declared their opinion to the contrary". Surely these holy marauders were types of the modern French.

Nor was it to the clergy they limited their infamous extortions and peculations, every loyalist had his estate sequestered. These were the glorious times when dissenters held the reins of power. Thank God, it was only for a short period ! Such was the situation, the disastrous situation of this country when Oliver Cromwell * was Protector ; Owen, Vice Chancellor of Oxford, Goodwin, President of Magdalene Hall ; Praise God Barebones, Speaker of the House of Commons ; and when the members of the senate, and in fact, all persons in power, affixed long scripture sentences to their names. I have seen a list of the grand jury for the county of Sussex at that period, where, among other curious names, I noticed the two following : " Kill Sin Pimple", and " Stand Fast in the Faith Stringer". Books with such titles as the following were then published : " Heaven taken by Storm", " Crumbs of Comfort for the Chickens of the Covenant", " A Whip and Spur for a heavy A——d Christian" " A gentle Shove for a Believer's Crupper".

* This is not designed to apply to Oliver Cromwell's political conduct when at the head of affairs.

I have said sufficient to convince you of the blasphemous enthusiasm so generally prevalent during the Commonwealth. The nation groaned under this intolerable burden for a few years; but, after the death of Cromwell, and the resignation of his son Richard—Broils and cabals between the republicans succeeded, until, by the dexterous policy of General Monk, the glorious Restoration of King Charles the Second took place. A preliminary treaty had been entered upon at Breda, in which the King had made some concessions with regard to the Toleration of Dissenters.

Monarchy being again established, and with it the Hierarchy of the Church, the King, unlike the persons who had lately been in power, acted in the most gentle and lenient manner to the Dissenters. A conference was appointed at the Savoy, in which twelve of the Bishops and twelve Presbyterian Divines assisted: the purport was to consider of a revision of the Liturgy, so as to render it palatable to the Dissenters. Mr. Baxter produced a Liturgy of his own, which seemed to suit the temper of neither party; in fine, the Presbyterians were so little inclined to relax from the old prejudices, that the concessions of the Episcopai Party proved of no avail, and the conference ended as it had began.

Overtures were made, and even the mitre offered to the principal ministers among them, if they would enter

enter within the pale of the Church. Two of their Divines accepted these gracious offers ; Dr. Reynolds, who was made Bishop of Norwich, and Dr. Wilkins, who was promoted to the see of Chester.

But while not only the olive-branch was held out, but even lucrative offers made, to those very men who had overthrown the Constitution and subverted the Government, it would have been rank injustice to have suffered the clergy to be banished from their livings, and tamely permit the Church emoluments to be enjoyed by men who were sworn enemies to it. To remedy this evil, and to discriminate between the Episcopalian and Non-conformist divines, then in possession of livings, the celebrated act of Uniformity was passed (1662) which occasioned two thousand ministers to resign their preferments.

The Dissenters have never ceased to pourtray, in the blackest colours, this act of justice to the English clergy. What right had these Dissenters to those livings ? — were they not obtained when the Church was destroyed, and Episcopacy abolished ? Did not the Incumbents, who had been legally induced, have their livings forcibly taken from them ? Where, then, was the hardship, where the cruelty, where the oppression, for those men either to conform to that Church into which they had intruded themselves, or else to resign them to those who were Conformists ? Neither can I see much magnanimity,

nanimity, nor suffering for “ righteousness’ sake,” in the resignation these divines made of ecclesiastical preferments unjustly obtained. Could they ever have had the madness to suppose, that, after the re-establishment of Episcopacy, they would be suffered to remain in the Church Non-conformists? Dr. Calamy thought proper to preserve memorials of these two thousand ejected ministers, to represent them in the light of martyrs and confessors.

The frequent cabals of the Dissenters against Government, during the rest of this Monarch’s reign, exposed them to those inconveniences which, by a quiet, peaceable, and humble deportment, they would have been exempted from. The clergy had been considerable sufferers in their persons, their property, and estates; it could not be expected they could look with the most friendly eye upon the men who had been rioting amidst the spoils of the Church. Penal laws against conventicles were made, and the Five Mile, the Corporation, and Test Acts, passed; which latter totally incapacitated any Dissenter from filling places of trust and importance under Government. This act has long been a sore grievance to them; but I shall reserve what I have to say upon it to a future letter.

James II. more effectually to answer his design of bringing in Popery, granted singular indulgences to the Dissenters; and so charmed were they with this complaisance

complaisance of the Monarch, that they presented to him the most flattering addresses of attachment to his Person and Government: and while they railed against Episcopacy, they could with pleasure see Popery making rapid strides to overwhelm the Kingdom. Shame at length operated upon them, and induced them to join with the clergy, in inviting over William Prince of Orange, to rescue this land from Popery, Tyranny, and Slavery.

King William being a Calvinist, the Dissenters had great hopes of extraordinary indulgence from him; and great pains did that Monarch take, to remove their grounds of opposition to the Church: but, splenetic and obstinate, they resisted every effort for a comprehension.

During the reign of Queen Anne, more especially towards the latter part of it, they became very obnoxious, and vented their rage against the High Church party in abusive invectives. Daniel de Foe signalized himself as a warm advocate in their behalf; he published “*The True-born Englishman*,” for which he was sentenced to the Pillory. De Foe was a Dissenter himself. During the trial of Dr. Sacheverel, the populace assembled in crowds, and gutted several of the Dissenting Meeting Houses — Very strong measures were taken by the Ministry to curb the turbulent spirit of the Dissenters; in particular, an act passed to prevent the growth of schism:

schism: but the sudden death of the Queen prevented this act from ever taking effect. The Dissenters could not dissemble their joy at the death of Queen Anne: their ministers even pointed out the finger of God as especially operating in their beha'f.

Since the accession of the illustrious House of Hanover to the Throne of these Kingdoms, the Protestant Dissenters have experienced the full enjoyment of unlimited toleration. But we find them, in the reigns of George I. and II. frequently joining men in opposition, and indulging the same spirit of virulence against the Church establishment. Gordon, in his "Independent Whig," and Baron, in his "Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken," evidenced the true spirit of the sect. Nor is it a circumstance that much redounds to the honour of the Dissenters, that the Earl of Kilmarnock (who was taken in open arms against his sovereign, in the rebellion of 1745) was a Dissenter, and during his imprisonment, and upon the scaffold on Tower-Hill, was attended by the most celebrated Dissenting Divine of that period, Dr. Forster of the Old Jewry, who published a pompous account of the behaviour of that nobleman at the place of execution.

I have thus, Sir; given your a very brief view of the conduct of the Dissenters, from their first establishment as a sect. And I have little doubt but you

you will agree with me in asserting, that they always have shown a bitter hatred to the Church establishment (this has been their invariable characteristic) and have frequently proved dangerous subjects to the State; but in no period whatever, more so than since the accession of His present Majesty to the Throne.

I have the honour to be, &c.

LETTER II.

Review of the Conduct of the Dissenters with respect to Mr. Wilkes; and the Revolt of the American Colonies.

DEAR SIR,

NO Monarch ever ascended a throne with more eclat than His present Majesty; and the first speech he delivered, endeared him to his subjects in a most especial manner. Never was there a prospect of greater serenity in the political horizon than at that period. But the turbulent passions of evil men and seducers, early began to excite discontent, and to raise a spirit of disaffection to Government.

The administration of the Earl of Bute was industriously calumniated by the party in opposition, and shoals of libels daily issued from the press. In these ebullitions of faction, you may rest assured the Dissenters had no little share; but their most active exertions were reserved, until the period when that mock patriot Mr. Wilkes first made his political débüt.

The

The parents of Mr. Wilkes were Dissenters ; his father was a Presbyterian, and attended a Dissenting Meeting, where afterwards I preached for nearly two years. John was educated in all the democratical spirit of the sect, and from that early taint we may attribute his subsequent virulent opposition to Government. After being the completest debauchee and rake, and publishing his infamous “ *Essay on Woman,* ” he commenced the *Hero of Liberty* ; under which specious pretence he juggled the multitude, and made them entertain the highest ideas of his political integrity, while he was only *fishing for a place!*

Round the standard of “ *Wilkes and Liberty* ” the Non-conformists flocked in crowds ; they highly extolled the virtue and patriotism of the man who had blasphemed the Christian religion, and became warm, but *very weak*, partisans of his cause. A Dissenter and a *Wilkite* were synonymous terms.

This was their boasted attachment to the House of Hanover ! this their gratitude for privileges unknown to, and unpossessed by their forefathers ! Wilkes was the bubble of a day, and, after having amused the gaping crowd for a while, got his pockets well filled, capered off with a grin, and sunk into that insignificance from which he first emerged, after heartily laughing at the credulity of his admirers.

But, if the behaviour of the Dissenters was highly indecent in interfering at all in politics, but especially in joining the head of Opposition, their conduct upon the breaking out of the war with the American Colonies, was more flagitious and wicked. It is to be observed, that those Colonies were principally composed of Dissenters, the descendants of those Puritans who had fled from this island in the reign of Charles the First. This cannot, however, be considered as the least palliation for the base conduct of the English Dissenters, in warmly and openly espousing the cause of men who were in arms against the Sovereign of the British Empire.

I shall not enter into any discussion of the policy or impolicy of the steps taken by those who were then in power, to reduce the Colonies to obedience; the unfortunate issue you well know.

But were not the Dissenters strenuously active in serving the interest of the disaffected Colonies at home? Was not the courage and vigour of the enemy much heightened by the repeated assurances they had of cordial assistance from their brethren on this side of the Atlantic? Did not the Dissenters use their utmost endeavours to blacken the measures of Government, and to weaken and destroy the confidence of the nation in its rulers? and were not their endeavours crowned with too much success? So much so, that I attribute the loss of America to the Protestant

testant Dissenters. Dr. Price, that firebrand of sedition, did the most essential service, by his inflammatory publications, to animate and invigorate the Colonies to persevere in their revolt. His exertions were seconded by the whole phalanx of the Dissenters, headed by the members of the senate in opposition to government ; thus, powerfully supported by a rank and discontented party here, they carried on the contest till they gained their independence.

“ Success to the Americans,” and “ General Washington,” were the standing favourite toasts among the Dissenters. One of their ministers (Dr. *Gordon*) went over to America, with the express purpose of spiriting *up* the Colonies to rebellion. He was settled at Roxburgh, and I have now before me, one of his pulpit orations, delivered on a fast day, to Congress.—This man, after the peace, had the effrontery to come back to England, and publish “ The History of the American War,” in 4 vols. 8vo. professedly written to misrepresent and give a false statement of the occurrences of the war. You will naturally surmise, that the Doctor must have a tolerable share of impudence ; and from his account of some of the principal engagements, you may judge, “ He was never whipped for lying.”

I have the honour to be, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.

DEAR SIR,

AFTER the unparalleled behaviour of the Dissenters, in joining the cause of America, you will be filled with just astonishment to find them applying for a repeal of those important acts, which prevent their occupying places of trust and importance. Some of the Arian and Unitarian Clergy, with the late Dr. John Jebb at their head, had held meetings at the Feathers Tavern, in the Strand, to solicit relief from "subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles;" in this application they were eagerly seconded by the Presbyterian Ministers, who were mostly Arians and Socinians:—this application was unsuccessful.

After the conclusion of the American war, the Dissenters, *sensible* how much they merited the favors of Government by their late **EXEMPLARY** behaviour, applied in the year 1787, for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. But, previous to noticing the

effects of this application, it may be proper to make a few remarks on the excellency and expediency of those acts.

“ Every community”, says an elegant and judicious writer, “ has a right to impose such limitations and restraints on the privileges of individuals, as are conducive to the public happiness and welfare of the society at large ; to determine by what qualifications the various ranks and orders of the State shall be distinguished, and what conditions and qualities shall be required of those who are to perform the necessary functions of each. Restraints of individuals, for public convenience, do really increase the happiness and liberty of the community in general ; the members of which, by the support of that constitution which secures to them every thing valuable in society, receive more in addition to their civil liberty, than they lose by the diminution of those private rights and privileges which are submitted to the public direction. Civil incapacities and restraints imposed by law, are not then necessarily evils ; they are not punishments ; they are not persecution ; but they are salutary provisions, made without supposition of any fault or transgression of any member of the community, for the more effectual security of the benefits of civil union.” *

* Dr. Thorpe’s, Archdeacon of Northumberland, Sermon on “ Establishments in Religion.”

A celebrated Prelate, a warm friend to the Dissenters, and an advocate for the repeal of those acts, has asserted, “ That civil incapacity brought upon men by law, is an evil affecting their property and their character; and that an exclusion from civil offices is persecution.” *

Such an assertion is more easily made than proved; and nothing, surely, but the *spirit of party* could have excited a person of such singular penetration and brilliant talents, as His Lordship undoubtedly possesses, to have made an observation which one moment’s cool reflection must show to be false and fallacious. That constitution which does not make use of every precaution, to guard and secure itself against the attacks of its enemies, must stand on a very precarious and rotten foundation.

As an impenetrable barrier against such attempts, was that wise law enacted, called “ The Test Act;” to secure and guard the State from the possibility of its being undermined, by the admission of improper persons to the exercising offices of trust and importance. While the Test Law remains, the State is secure; — if ever that should be repealed, the venerable fabric of our Constitution will fall into ruins, and a Democracy arise in its stead.

* Bishop of Llandaff’s Charge to his Clergy, June, 1791, page 11 and 12. —

The Dissenters complain, that there is no reason to suspect danger from them — they are peaceable and innoxious; so is the tiger when confined in his den, when he has not the power to destroy. The Dissenters, while the Test Act remains, cannot openly subvert the Government; and whilst they are excluded from posts of authority, they can only show their teeth, but cannot bite.

The wisdom of Parliament, in the year 1787, decided, that the Test Laws should not be repealed. Mr. Beaufoy was on this occasion the advocate for the repeal. Not baffled by this rebuff, the Dissenters, two years after (1789) applied again to Parliament; and Mr. Beaufoy once more came forward as the champion of the party, aided by Mr. Fox. Again did they find their hopes chimerical; the majority of the House voted against the repeal.

With determined obstinacy, they still persisted in their claims to have the Test Laws repealed.— It was upon this last occasion, that Dr. Priestley addressed a most infamous invective to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which he threatened him with the evil consequences of opposing this application.

It was in the year 1790 that the Dissenters, mustering up all their strength, selected Mr. Fox to plead their cause in the senate. These factious

demagogues could not have adopted a measure better calculated to defeat their cause. Every intelligent person easily perceived the hostile designs they had upon the Constitution ; they saw that, to bring about their own ends, they would coalesce with any man who espoused their cause. That they had raised the highest expectations from this grand attack, is evident, by their insolent behaviour, their extravagant boastings, their pompous declamations.

The important day at length arrived, which was to decide *the fate of this Kingdom!*—the 2d of March 1790 — a day ever to be remembered ! Mr. Pitt, with his accustomed penetration, had previously moved for a Call of the House ; he resolved that a question of such infinite moment should not be canvassed but in a full House. Mr. Fox, with specious eloquence, said every thing trite and common on the subject, agreeably to the instructions he had received from the Dissenters. The motion was seconded by Sir Harry Houghton, *a conforming Presbyterian.* Mr. Pitt replied to the arguments of Mr. Fox with a force of eloquence, and with such copiousness and solidity of argument, as most powerfully to impress the House. A more animated, energetic, and comprehensive speech, was never delivered within the walls of St. Stephen's Chapel. He was followed by Mr. Burke, in a high strain of eloquence. At three o'clock, the House divided

vided on the question, and a very great majority negatived the motion for the Repeal.

Thus were the Dissenters once more completely defeated in their nefarious attempts “ to blow up and undermine the Constitution.” And may every attempt (if they ever should have the madness to attempt) to remove the ancient bulwarks of the Constitution, tend only to cover them with disgrace and confusion.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

French Revolution.

DEAR SIR,

YOU will not wonder at the arrogant behaviour of the Dissenters upon their last attempt to raise themselves into power, when you reflect that the Revolution had broke out in France a year before. With an enthusiasm bordering upon frenzy did the Dissenters view this event: it appeared to them as a foretaste of what they wished and hoped for in this country; it was like taking a peep from *Pijsab's Mount* at the promised land. As in the application for a Repeal of the Test Act, all the religious denominations had shaken hands, and were determined "to pull all together," to gain their point, so, when the French Revolution began, every Pulpit resounded with Liberty. The Calvinist and the Unitarian, the Anabaptist and the Methodist, all agreed in hailing this auspicious event. The *Hierophant* of the party, the High-priest of sedition, took the lead, and blew a blast not like John Knox, against

against the whole regiment of Women, but against the whole regiment of Emperors, Kings, Potentates, Prelates, &c.

Dr. Price, or rather (as Mr. Burke has compared him to) *Hugh Peters Reavivus*, seized the opportunity of the celebration of the Anniversary of the Revolution, to preach a political sermon upon the Revolution in France, and blasphemously adopted the “*Nunc dimittis*” of good old Simeon to the occasion. In this discourse the Revolution in France was spoken of with the highest and most rapturous applause; and gentle hints given of the expediency of such an one at home.

As I have elsewhere shewn, * the Dissenters seized every opportunity of fomenting disaffection to Government: they supported Mr. Wilkes, they abetted the Americans, they joined (a great number of them) Lord G. Gordon in the year 1780, and, previous to the French Revolution, they had made use of the 4th of November, the Anniversary of the Revolution, to preach inflammatory discourses. Attend to the language of one of their preachers on this occasion: “ What are all the amazing Revolutions that have taken place in the Governments of this World, but the *spirited* and successful exertions of men, who, when they saw their miseries beyond remedy, declared them to be past endu-

* See Letter 2d.

“rance! What, but the vigorous and applauded efforts of such individuals and states, to regain the liberty in which God and Nature had made them free!”* “The day has dawned, and the day-star has risen in the hearts of all men ; and in that knowledge which pervades the world, we have a greater security for the liberty and happiness of the world, than *ten thousand Charters or Acts of Parliament!*”†. In Dr. Price’s discourses “On the Love of our Country,” you will find numerous passages of a more dangerous tendency.

The dying and expiring hopes of the Dissenters revived with the establishment of the National Assembly of France. Dr. Price was overwhelmed with the panegyrical addresses he received from that assembly and other Parisian societies. This roused the emulation of the sceptical Priestley, who, after having been completely vanquished in his Theological attacks upon the Doctrines of the Church of England, by those able polemic writers, Dr. Horsley, the present Bishop of Rochester, and the Rev. Mr. Burn, of Birmingham, began to enter the region of politics, by the publishing a series of Letters to Mr. Burke on his celebrated work on the French Revolution. His subsequent conduct both in the Pulpit and out of it, became so daring, that, alarmed at

* Sermon preached at Peckham, Surrey, Nov. 2, 1788, by the Rev. R. Jones, p. 23.

† Ibid. p. 26.

the danger to which the Church and State was exposed, by the conduct of this turbulent and haughty man, the inhabitants of Birmingham expelled him from their town, burnt and destroyed his meeting-house and dwelling-house in the memorable riots at that place.

To Dr. Priestley, his Coadjutors, and the Dissenters at large, were the tumults owing ; long had the common people endured the virulent harangues of the Dissenting-preachers at that place, against the established Church, with uncommon patience ; but, when the hand-bill appeared, justly suspected to be the production of a Dissenting preacher, * that kindled the rage of the incensed multitude, and, while the Dissenters were indelicately celebrating the Orgies of French Liberty, with uncontrollable licentiousness, they began those acts of violence, which, by the calm and intrepid conduct of the neighbouring Nobility and Clergy, were at length stopped. The primary author of this commotion, the disturber of the peace of society, absconded, and sought an asylum with his Republican brethren in London and *Hackney*. With unparalleled assurance, he wished to pass himself to the world as a martyr for truth ! while, instead of confessing the impropriety of his conduct, he vindicated it.—His conduct afterwards at *Hackney* is too well known to require recapitulation.

* See Mr. Dundas's Speech in the House of Commons, May 21, 1792.

But,

But, I limit not myself to the conduct of Price and Priestley : it may be justly retorted, that the Dissenters as a body, were not to be censured for the imprudent conduct of two of their teachers. I will take a wider range ; I will prove to you, Sir, that the Dissenters as a body, tacitly approved of the conduct of their leaders. If they had not, would they have tamely submitted to the just reproaches with which they were scourged ; did not their silence denote, if not their approbation, at least, that they were not *displeased*? If they had been that loyal body of men, which they are sometimes arrogant enough to stile themselves, why did they not pass a vote of censure upon Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley for their political conduct? Why did not they disavow their principles? These queries are easily replied to : because, they secretly *approved of them*.—Secretly, did I say, they openly approved of them.

To prove this, I will give you the following facts :—That the Dissenters, since the death of Price, and the exile of Priestley, have been more than ever the partisans of French Democracy. Dr. Price lived not to see the death of Lewis XVI.; the elevation and infernal tyranny of Robespierre ; Dr. Price lived not to see the nation of France avowing, in the face of all Europe, their disbelief of the existence of a God ;—perhaps, had he lived to such a period, he probably might have altered his ideas, on seeing “ God’s Salvation” exemplified

plified in the French nation. But the Dissenters have uniformly stuck by the French, even when they were Atheists; even during the reign of Robespierre; they have joined in all the combinations of disaffected men, to attempt a Revolution here; and their Meeting-houses (with a very trifling exception) have been converted into *Assemblies of Sedition*. Think me not severe; I appeal to facts; facts, that must speak home to every man's bosom.

As to calling the *King a fool* and a *blockhead*; refusing to pray for him in their public worship; drinking success to the French; adorning their parlours with portraits of Buonaparte, Tom Paine, Horn Tooke, and others; and, *perhaps*, a *little ivory Guillotine* in some fly corner; I pass over such circumstances as these; what I limit myself to, is their *plotting Treason*. That the Dissenters were active Members of the London Corresponding Society, is an incontrovertible truth. Thomas Hardy, who was tried for Treason, and who was the leading man in the society, is a member of a Dissenting church, the *pastor of which*, by his conduct, nearly escaped being placed in a similar condition. The following anecdote, relating to this *pious and loyal* society of Non Cons, is worthy your notice: Upon a Sunday previous to the last Fast-day but one, a minister preached, (not the minister of the place) who afterwards gave notice, that service would be performed

there on the Fast-day. Though he himself was a Democrat, he had got among a still more desperate set; they thronged about him as he came from the pulpit, and demanded, "Who gave him authority to mention about the observance of a Fast-day; they knew no King there but Jesus." *Thelwall's Lectures* were principally attended by Dissenters. Upon Hardy's trial a *Dissenting Minister* appeared for his character.

Jeremiah Joyce, Chaplain to Earl Stanhope, was brought up at Hackney College, and was a Dissenting Minister. On the very first Sunday after his acquittal at the Old Bailey, he preached at the most respectable meeting-house the Dissenters have in the Metropolis, the Rev. Mr. Tayler's, Carter Lane, St. Paul's.

Can any person dare to say, that this was not flying in the face of Government most audaciously? Treason was not proved against Mr. Joyce, but enough was proved to show he was a dangerous man, an enemy to Government; notwithstanding, the Dissenters cordially received him into their society again, as a *Teacher*. Good God! if they had not been sworn enemies to the Government, they never could have acted such a part.

But

But again, you recollect Mr. Winterbotham (an afflstant preacher at a Dissenting Chapel in the country) being fully convicted of preaching sedition? — He was sentenced to be imprisoned in Newgate; but the moment he was released, the Dissenters in London *sollicitated him to preach among them*: and the first Sunday of his being at large, he actually preached to crowded audiences in Devonshire-Street, Bishopsgate-Street.

This is plain and indisputable evidence of the Dissenters' attachment to the House of Hanover; — or rather, is it not proof *direct* of their attachment to the French Directory?

But, Sir, this is not all. Thomas Paine, the apostle of Anarchy, was a Dissenter, and (I have heard) once an itinerant preacher. — The known predilection of the Dissenters for the writings of this gentleman is evident, not only from the immense number of copies of “*The Rights of Man*,” bought and distributed by them, but also by the following circumstance. When that treatise was in manuscript, and the *policy* of publishing it was under discussion, lest it should not be circulated, numbers of Dissenters wrote out copies of it; which were most industriously distributed, and copies taken from them: so that had it never appeared *in print*, it

would have had a rapid circulation in a clandestine and *private* manner.

To proceed. The most obnoxious writers against Government, and in behalf of the pretended rights of man, have been brought up by or else are now among the Dissenters. Godwin, the author of Political Justice, was a Dissenting Minister at Beaconsfield; Gilbert Wakefield is a Dissenter; Frend, who was expelled the University of Cambridge, now associates with Dissenters; the Conductors of the Monthly Review are Dissenters; the Conductors of the Analytical Review are Dissenters; the chief Conductors of the Critical Review are Dissenters! — Benjamin Flower, the printer and editor of a Cambridge Paper (well known for its opposition to Government) is a Dissenter. And among those persons who have been convicted of high treason, as before alluded to, we shall find them altogether Dissenters. Thomas Muir, Fysche Palmer, Gerald, and Skirving, all Presbyterians.

The Dissenters are almost exclusively the purchasers of the Jacobin Prints. *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Courier*, are chiefly supported by Dissenters!

Do you, my dear Sir, wish for more irrefragable and incontestible proofs, that the Dissenters are a body

body inimical to the State? Did I not think that I should tire your patience, I could furnish you with more instances; but, fully sensible of your coincidence in this sentiment with myself, I shall only trouble you with another letter, respecting Ireland. In the interim,

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Conduct of the Dissenters in Ireland.

Conclusion.

DEAR SIR,

WITH the most sincere pleasure do I congratulate you on the total defeat of the French, and the Rebels, in Ireland. And, Sir, if any additional proof was necessary, to prove the disloyalty of the Dissenters, a very melancholy one offers itself, in their most atrocious conduct in raising the standard of rebellion, conjointly with the Roman Catholics,

Methinks I see you shrink back with horror ! Not all the ghosts and goblins, and Castle Spectres, our novel writers and dramatists have brought forward to view, could amaze you more than this wild, unnatural, and infernal coalition.

For men (that seceded from the Church of England because it retained some of the ceremonies of the *Church of Rome* ; men that would not join the established

established religion because it was too nearly allied to *Antichrist*) to give the fraternal embrace to priests and friers, to join in strict union with *Antichrist*, to overturn the Reformed Religion — “ Be astonished, O ye heavens, and be horribly afraid thou earth ! ” for never, since God created the heavens and the earth, was there such an unnatural combination formed !!!

Shades of Knox, Cartwright, Sampson, Robinson, Owen, Goodwin — will ye not re-visit such a generation, and upbraid them with their conduct ! But words are inadequate to express my abhorrence of the conduct of these men.

While they exclaimed against the Liturgy, and the vestments, habits, and ceremonies, of the Church of England, I viewed them as honest men ; and I applauded their sincerity.—But, when I see them give the right hand of fellowship to the Church of Rome, merely to assist in pulling down the Reformed Church, I view them as the basest villains. Such has, for some time, been the policy of the Dissenters ; they have joined the Roman Catholics in contending for a repeal of the penal laws.

I lately read a sermon, by Mr. Kenrick of Exeter, in which, after giving the essence of Fox’s Martyrology, he concludes by saying, that the Roman Ca-

tholics of the present day are the most inoffensive, humblest, set of beings existing ; and from them he makes a skip to the Dissenters, whom he argues, ought to be admitted to the first places under Government.

The late proceedings in Ireland will furnish you with sufficient instances of the Presbyterians being the chief agents in that wretched rebellion, which has caused so much blood and slaughter. Among the traitors tried and executed, Roman Catholic priests and Dissenting Clergymen cut a most conspicuous figure.

May these open, recent, instances of the treachery of Protestant Dissenters, have their due effect upon every friend of the established religion ; may it open their eyes to see the danger to be justly apprehended from men who, under pretence of seceding from the Church *because it had too great a similitude to Popery*, will join with Papists, nay with *Deists* and *Atheists*, to overthrow it.

I hope, Sir, that you will acquit me of a want of candour, in what has been stated in these letters ; if I have erred, it is in favour of that sect among whom I first drew my breath ; but from whom, from motives of the purest integrity, I have now separated.

There

There are individuals among them, even among their Teachers, whom I respect and revere ; whose loyalty I would myself vouch for, and even be security : but that number is very small indeed — it reminds me of Dean Swift and his dearly beloved Roger. As a body, I view them as enemies of our most excellent Constitution ; I view them as intolerant as Roman Catholics ; I view them as bigotted as any votaries of the Roman Church : and in their circle of ministers, there is many a Gardiner, many a Bonner, many a Whitgift, and many a Laud who, though not honoured with a mitre or decorated with lawn sleeves, exercise a dominion and supremacy more than Episcopal or Archiepiscopal.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

POSTSCRIPT.

IN addition to what I have stated, I cannot help adverting to the conduct of the Dissenters, as to the *Voluntary Contributions*. To their eternal disgrace be it said, that at a crisis the most important the annals of this country afford ; when threatened with an

Invasion, though called upon by the chief magistrate of the city (though circular letters were sent to their *Ministers* to exhort them to contribute) neither *Ministers* nor *People* stirred one step in the business; but treated the Letters and the Contributions with the most sovereign contempt. Will they, after this conduct, dare to style themselves “ loyal subjects ?” Oh shame, where is thy blush !

FINIS.

